

ICONS & INFLUENCES

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Jennifer Lopez

*How She Broke
All the Rules
to Get to the Top*



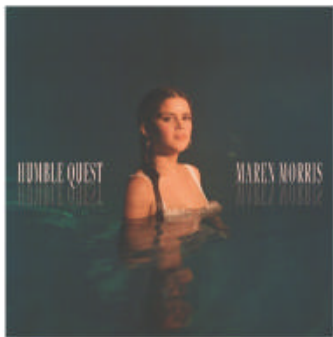
Reviews

Music

MAREN MORRIS FINDS A NEW ROAD

The eclectic Nashville star pushes against her own brand on her third album

By JONATHAN BERNSTEIN



Maren Morris

Humble Quest

COLUMBIA NASHVILLE

★★★★☆

WHEN MAREN Morris released her 2018 pop breakthrough, “The Middle,” the song introduced one of her guiding philosophies with a simple question: “Why don’t you just meet me in the middle?”

Ever since debuting with 2015’s soulful singalong “My Church,” Morris has carved out her space as Nashville’s most thoughtful hitmaker, despite steering her career in seemingly unexpected directions: She’s the only pop singer who could just as credibly appear with Zedd at a Vegas nightclub and perform at the Newport Folk Festival alongside the Highwomen, her singer-songwriter supergroup. All the while, Morris ➔

ILLUSTRATION BY
Sandra Dionisi



➔ MAREN MORRIS

has found a reliable home as a country-music centrist; her last album, 2019's *Girl*, yielded two Number One hits on country radio.

Morris opens *Humble Quest*, her fascinating, and proudly unresolved, third record by questioning those accolades: "Couple hundred songs and the ones that finally worked/ Was the one about a car and the one about a church," she sings on "Circles Around This Town." It's a cutting dismissal of the system Morris is working within, and a declaration of a break with her past self. Does the rest of the LP live up to such a daring proclamation?

Yes and no. There are precisely zero churches or trucks on Morris' latest. Instead, the Texas singer luxuriates in tasteful adult pop rock in the vein of Sheryl Crow and John Mayer, collaborating with producer Greg Kurstin, an A-list practitioner of the sound (Adele, James Blunt, Foo Fighters).

Kurstin and Morris previously collaborated on the singer's 2019 crossover blockbuster "The Bones," which serves as a blueprint here. If there's a central thesis to *Humble Quest*, it's that for Morris, and her husband, fellow country singer Ryan Hurd, the bones are, indeed, very good. This is an album devoted to grown-up love and committed relationships, suited to soundtrack any number of future milestones, from first dances ("I Can't Love You Anymore") to funerals ("What Would This World Do") to friendiversaries ("Good Friends").

Humble Quest is at its best when it's poking holes in its own premise, whether on the searching title track, when Morris admits she hasn't found what she's looking for, or on "Detour," when she conjures the Chicks ("Might take the long way") and admits something devastating: "Not supposed to cry when all the skies are blue," she sings, in a photo negative of the confidence of "Circles Around This Town." "But I was disappointed when I saw the view."

Then there's "Hummingbird," an Appalachian-style folk ballad about her baby son. It's a stark moment of intimacy that fits a sentiment she offers at the beginning of the album: "Trying to say something with meaning, something worth singing about." *Humble Quest* works because she never pretends that it's easy. **R**



Raveena

BREAKING

Raveena's Border-Breaking Pop Sunshine

RAVEENA AURORA is a singer-songwriter who exalts in the spaces between R&B, folk, and pop. Her bright-hued 2019 album, *Lucid*, got her on some best-of lists, and now she's upping her game with her major-label debut, *Asha's Awakening*. Raveena, who grew up in Connecticut and Queens, New York, draws on her Indian roots, mixing Bollywood influences into songs like the dreamy "Asha's Kiss," featuring iconic artist Asha Puthli, and the radiantly pretty single "Rush," which cleverly riffs on notions of exotic desire over a transporting hand-clap groove. It's the sound of self-discovery drawn from many sources. **JON DOLAN**

HURRAY FOR THE RIFF RAFF RISE UP

Alynda Segarra has made a powerful album about finding a freedom in dark times By JON FREEMAN

HURRAY FOR the Riff Raff's 2017 album, *The Navigator*, was Alynda Segarra's project of reclamation, a means for the New Orleans songwriter to explore their Puerto Rican roots and expand beyond their group's scruffy country-folk origins. Segarra had

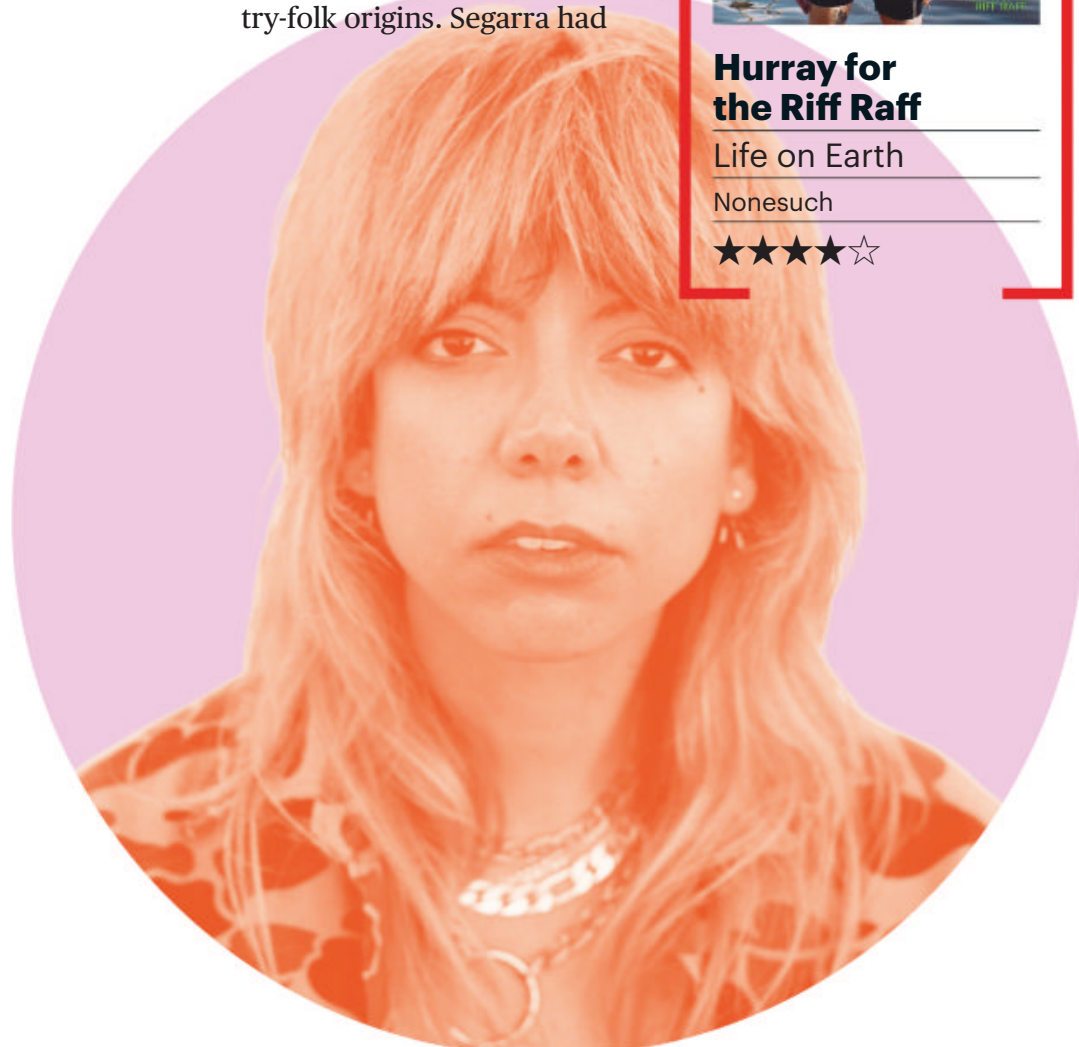


Hurray for the Riff Raff

Life on Earth

Nonesuch

★★★★☆



recently traveled to Puerto Rico, and their experience witnessing people finding joy despite grueling social conditions came out in the album's themes of survival and resilience.

Segarra's new album, *Life on Earth*, feels less overtly political, but still has a fiery

sense of urgency, maybe due to the fact that we're all presently living through exhausting, traumatic times. The new songs grapple with what it means to seek freedom when there's seemingly nowhere to go – "because it's not safe at home anymore," as Segarra sings on "Wolves."

Despite the dystopian atmosphere, these songs brim with something like hope – not the naive kind, but a feeling sturdy enough to withstand whatever storms inevitably get tossed one's way.

Sometimes that means looking for messages in the sky, as on "Pointed at the Sun" and the reggaeton-influenced "Jupiter's Dance," or, as with "Pierced Arrows," it can mean trying to keep memories of a bad breakup at bay.







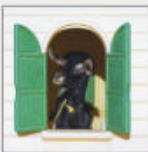



Life on Earth continues to push Hurray for the Riff Raff in interesting new musical directions. "Pierced Arrows" employs a tense post-punk groove that's underpinned by a buzzing synth bass line, while "Pointed at the Sun" is a big, jangling indie-rock number. There are more electronic elements as well: "Wolves" matches lush synth pads to a programmed beat and burbling noise, and "Precious Cargo" features Segarra rapping about an immigrant's harrowing border-crossing experience over a funky drum loop.

The beatless "Rosemary's Tears" has an R&B sensuousness to it, glistening with watery keys, warm gusts of brass, and Segarra's aching, expressive voice. They use that instrument to similar effect on the title track, a resolute piano ballad assisted by muted horns that patiently lays out the overlapping beauty and agony of existence.

Segarra's search for freedom also includes loosening the grip of trauma. Inspired by Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's accusations about Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, "Saga" calls to mind the sound of Wilco's "Kamera" as it documents sexual assault. "I just want to be free, get over it in time/Push it out of my mind," Segarra sings. With this vital, empathetic album, Hurray for the Riff Raff offer a reminder that we can still plot a course out of the darkness and write a different story. **R**

Quick Hits

Ten new albums you need to know about now


Eddie Vedder Earthling Republic		ED SHREDS The Pearl Jam singer teams up with producer-guitarist Andrew Watt (Ozzy, Post Malone) for a killer straight-ahead rock LP, with guest appearances by Elton John, Stevie Wonder, and Ringo Starr.	★★★★★☆☆
Nilüfer Yanya Painless ATO		NIL THRILLS The second album from this U.K. singer-songwriter is a beguiling good time, slipping between genres and moods with speedy ease, like an entire season rushing by in a lovely blur.	★★★★★☆☆
Dashboard Confessional All the Truth That I Can Tell Hidden Note		MIDDLE-AGE EMO Chris Carrabba delivers the classic Dashboard sound (mostly acoustic, deadly earnest), updating for his (and your) forties, with songs about how kids are great and life is hard.	★★★★★☆☆
Shamir Heterosexuality AntiFragile		GENDER BENDER With titles like “Cisgender” and “Gay Agenda,” the adventurous indie artist taps Nineties rock, pop punk, and industrial elements to create an inventive commentary on queer identity.	★★★★★☆☆
Robert Glasper Black Radio III Loma Vista		MASTER BLASTER Veteran jazz pianist Glasper incorporates soulful hip-hop into a smooth contemporary-jazz context, with assists from rap and R&B innovators like Killer Mike and BJ the Chicago Kid.	★★★★★☆☆
Band of Horses Things Are Great BMG		GIDDYAP! This Seattle band’s rustic rock can sometimes seem too mellow, but they sound refreshed on their first new album in six years, leaning into their power-pop Crazy Horse side on songs like “Lights.”	★★★★★☆☆
Superchunk Wild Loneliness Merge		STILL SUPER The beloved indie rockers try out some new things here, like jangly restraint and even horns (on “Highly Suspect”), and the result is an engrossing album full of stock-taking warmth.	★★★★★☆☆
Kaina It Was a Home City Slang		SWEET HOME This Latin American singer and songwriter, who hails from Chicago, delivers an LP that’s at once dreamy and soulful as she sings about the search for authenticity, community, and love.	★★★★★☆☆
Amber Mark Three Dimensions Deep Interscope		SPACE CASE The New York R&B artist moves easily between funk, pop, and R&B on her full-length debut, but gets a little tangled in her lyrics’ cosmic themes, making for a needlessly bumpy astral journey.	★★★★★☆☆
Spiritualized Everything Was Beautiful Fat Possum		KINDRED SPIRITS Most of Spiritualized’s ninth LP comes off intricate, elastic, and soulful — just how the group has always intended to sound. Even their deepest trips have a down-to-earth feel.	★★★★★☆☆

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CHILLING OUT WITH SONIC YOUTH

A new archival collection shows the New York noise heroes at their best

BY THEIR THIRD and last decade, New York noise heroes Sonic Youth opted for their version of chilling out. That same feeling comes across in this archival collection of mostly instrumental jams from throughout the 10 years before Thurston Moore and Kim Gordon’s marriage fell apart, taking the band with it. What could be a random



Sonic Youth
In/Out/In
★★★★★☆☆

set of toss-offs feels like a fully realized album. As if taking their cue from the years when they tried to fit in with the Lollapalooza crowd, the band rarely descends into formless feedback. They stay locked into the grooves, so that the sprawling brute force of “Out and In” recalls the *Daydream Nation* era, “Machine” feels like a *Dirty* outtake, and “Basement Contender” captures the brittle beauty of their latter-period work — the way a casual strummy jam could still build into a whirlwind. Even as guitars and rock itself were starting to take a cultural back seat, Sonic Youth could make the unhurried sound thrilling.

DAVID BROWNE

Gordon



FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: SCOTT DUDERSON/GETTY IMAGES; SCOTT LEGATO/WIREIMAGE; JOHNNY NUNEZ/WIREIMAGE; RICK KERN/GETTY IMAGES; NBC; JEAN BAPTISTE LACROIX/WIREIMAGE